



the episcopal church in the diocese of los angeles

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January 17, 1977

A PASTORAL LETTER TO BE READ AT ALL SERVICES, SUNDAY, JANUARY 23, 1977

To all members of our Diocesan Family: Greetings in the Name of Christ.

We hope that your celebrations of Christmas and the Epiphany were very joyful, and that you look forward to this New Year with goodly hope and expectation. There is every reason to rejoice in 1977 as a year of continuing vigorous Christian ministry and evangelism, and of lives renewed through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

It must be conceded, however, that this New Year commences on a note which brings pain to many of us who deeply love and cherish the Episcopal Church as our Christian community and home.

Some priests and laypersons of this Diocese recently met together to discuss plans for the formation of a new ecclesiastical structure to be known as the Anglican Province for North America. This Province would not be in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Rather, its establishment would create a refuge outside the Anglican Communion for those unable to continue in fellowship with a Church permitting the ordination of women to the priesthood. They would cut themselves off from our ancient heritage and hallowed roots which represent our continuity with the Apostolic Age.

It deeply grieves me, as I am sure it does you, that some of our brothers and sisters of the Diocese presently view schism as a "lesser evil." We all respect their differing opinions and welcome dissenting voices as a catalyst for continually testing the Scriptural soundness of the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of the Church as interpreted in each new generation. A responsible "loyal opposition" is essential to the vitality of the Church. Without such voices, the Holy Spirit will inevitably find it more difficult to correct errors where such exist. Schism, therefore, becomes a serious hindrance to the working of the Holy Spirit in days when reconciliation yet continues a viable possibility.

These past months, we and many of you have prayed and agonized over this question, striving to hear the clear voice of the Holy Spirit teaching us the path of obedience to God's will. Not all of us have heard the same voice, however patiently and quietly we each have spent our hours of watching and waiting in our personal Gardens of Gethsemane. In good conscience, we have each taken our stand, feeling the pain of the choice and hurt in the knowledge of inevitable consequences, whatever the choice.

THE RIGHT REVEREND ROBERT CLAFLIN RUSACK, S.T.D., D.D., BISHOP

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In response to the apparent desire of some among us to leave the Episcopal Church--their choice made, and schism their chosen consequence--your Bishop wishes to publish the following points to all within this Diocesan family:

1. We urge you all, as is your Bishop's promise and position, to remain steadfast in "your love for all the brethren," our Episcopal brothers and sisters in Christ. We do not wish that any persons leave our fellowship, but if that is the desire of some, we pledge ourself--and beseech each of you, also, in imitation of the witness of Jesus Christ--to continue to care for them, to pray for them, and to be ever ready to welcome them home again with only happy celebration and rejoicing. We close no doors. Rather, we do all possible to keep all doors wide open in the expectation of eventual reconciliation, through the healing power and infinite wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

2. We assure all who are concerned and anxious, as I have said on many other occasions, that under no circumstances whatsoever will a congregation be required to receive an ordained woman as its priest. Local desires and sensitivities will be scrupulously respected. The mandate of General Convention was deliberately and clearly in the tone of "may" and not "shall," and we remain committed to this permissive stance.

3. In every congregation considering separation from the Episcopal Church, there are many devout souls who continue in their faithfulness to their Church, to their Diocese, and to their Bishop. These fellow Episcopalians are presently suffering, are confused, and are fearful of how and where they will continue to find an altar for worship in their traditional manner and a priest to minister to them in their times of pastoral need. Families are being hurt by a difference of feelings in this entire matter.

I wish to assure all that your Bishop will see to it that their needs and desires are fully and sensitively satisfied. They will not be set adrift as ones without a shepherd, a priest, an altar.

I beg each of you, priest or layperson, to do all within your power to lend a loving and reconciling hand to these souls, whenever one may turn to you for help or solace.

4. Each of the four congregations publicly announced as participating in the recent meeting has a long and distinguished history within the life of this Diocese. Clergy and laity of these parishes have, throughout the life of this Diocese, been honored and respected members of our family. It would be tragic if the hallowed traditions

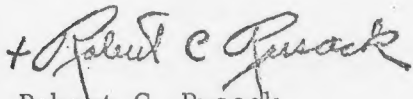
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and firm foundations created and established by saints of former days were to be removed from our midst in a passing moment of intense feelings and controversy, with no opportunity afforded for healing to occur.

We hope and pray that sufficient time may be allowed for the reconciling power of the Holy Spirit to work in all of us, and that our differences may be resolved within the family and not in the media. Scripture teaches us that Christians resolve their differences quietly, and with charity, mutual respect, forbearance, and understanding. Felicitous compromises, consistent with established Discipline, are always possible. Let us pray that this may be our chosen path to a healing among us.

In conclusion, we again bring you greetings, rooted in the firm conviction that 1977 will be a great and glorious year in the ongoing life of our Episcopal Church and this Diocese, in its many congregations of faithful followers of our Lord and Saviour. Be of good hope and of good cheer! Though there are clouds overhead, these will pass as a greater mission calls us forward: to make Jesus Christ more widely known, and an ever more vital and living Reality in our lives and in the lives of those drawn into the family by our witness and evangelism. God richly bless you all. Amen.

Faithfully yours in our Lord,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert C. Rusack". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross-like mark at the beginning.

Robert C. Rusack
Bishop of Los Angeles